



Gallatin River Ranch Rural Fire Department
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DOBT.
DATE 2-15-11
HB 400

Local Government Committee
Montana House of Representatives

February 15, 2011

Dear Chairman MacLaren:

We ask that you oppose House Bill 400 which would prohibit local governments from imposing fees for responses to motor vehicle accidents.

Many of the fire departments in the state are small, volunteer organizations that struggle to fund basic services. Some have a response area that include parts of the Interstate Highway System and other major highways, both of which have high traffic counts and also an increased number of motor vehicle accidents. Some of these accidents include heavy trucks that require specialized (and expensive) rescue equipment in order to gain access to the patients in a safe and timely manner.

The majority of the fire departments in Montana will not charge a fee for specialized rescue services required for these major vehicle crashes, but the option should be available. Some departments have an annual income from tax revenue of \$3000 which must cover expenses such as utilities, fuel, insurance, vehicle maintenance and repairs, equipment replacement, rescue equipment, and training.

Many areas of Gallatin County, as well as the state, are not in any fire district or fire service area and as a result do not contribute money toward the operation of the fire department. Many times our local fire departments respond to motor vehicle accidents outside of their legal boundaries, at the request of the Sheriff's Department, to provide extrication services. Presently these out of district responses are funded solely by the taxpayers of the fire district. An option should be available if the locally elected fire district Board of Trustees decides to seek reimbursement for the services provided.

In the interest of providing the best possible fire and rescue services at a fair and economical cost, we ask that you oppose House Bill 400.

Sincerely,

Ross Johnson
Fire Chief